

REMARKS

In response to the official Office Action dated October 23, 2003, claims 15, 22-24, and 34 have been amended to address the rejections/objections to the claims under 35 U.S.C. § 112. The amendments do not narrow the scope of the claim, but merely clarify the ambiguous language of the original claims. For reasons discussed below, Applicant believes that the claims define over the prior art made of record by the Examiner, and re-examination of this application is therefore respectfully requested.

The invention relates to a two-step method for generating certified time stamp receipts for digital documents. In the first stage, identifying data, such as a hash of the document, is presented to a time stamping authority. The time stamping authority appends a time stamp to the identifying data to create an uncertified time stamp receipt. Additionally, the time stamping authority generates a message authentication code based on the uncertified time stamp receipt and a secret key. The uncertified time stamp receipt and the message authentication code are transmitted to the requestor.

In the second stage, either the original requestor or other third party may request certification of the time stamp receipt. The requestor or other third party presents the uncertified time stamp receipt and the message authentication code to the time stamping authority. The time stamping authority validates the message authentication code and, if the message authentication code is valid, recertifies the time stamp receipt using a private signature key.

The prior art cited by the Examiner does not teach or suggest the two-stage certification process. The Haber patent discloses a conventional signal stage certification process. In Haber, a requestor presents identifying data, such as a hash of a document, to the TSA. The TSA appends the current time to the identifying data to create a time stamp receipt and then immediately certifies the time stamp receipt using a private signature key. Haber does not teach or suggest "generating ... a message authentication code based on said time stamp

receipt and a secret key.” In the context of the claimed invention, validation of the message authentication code is a condition to certification of the time stamp receipt in the second stage of the certification process. Because the time stamp receipt in Haber is certified immediately, there is no need to generate a message authentication code. Even if there were some delay between the creation of the time stamp receipt and its certification in Haber, the certification in Haber is not conditioned upon the validation of a message authentication code.

Claim 1 requires that a time stamp request and certification request be made at two distinct times. In Haber, a signal request is made for a certified time stamp receipt. Therefore, Haber does not meet the limitations in claim 1 that the time stamp request be presented at a first time and the certification request be presented at a second time. Claim 1 further requires generating a message authentication code on a time stamp receipt and a secret key. Haber does not disclose generating a message authentication code. Finally, claim 1 states that the time stamp is certified “if said message authentication code is valid.” In Haber, the certification is not conditioned upon validity of a message authentication code. For these reasons, claim 1 is not anticipated, nor rendered obvious, by Haber.

Independent claim 15 is similar to independent claim 1 but includes additional steps. In particular, claim 15 includes receiving a time stamp request and certification request at first and second times, respectively, generating a message authentication code based on a time stamp receipt and a secret key, and conditionally certifying the time stamp receipt if the message authentication code is valid. Accordingly, claim 15 is allowable over the art cited by the Examiner for the same reasons as claim 1.

Claim 29 is a method claim directed to the first stage of the certification process. Claim 29 recites generating a message authentication code based on a time stamp receipt and a secret key, and transmitting the time stamp receipt and message authentication code to a requestor. As noted above, Haber does not disclose generating a message authentication code

on a time stamp receipt or transmitting a message authentication code to a requestor. Because Haber does not disclose these elements, it does not anticipate claim 29.

Claim 41 recites acts associated with the second stage of the certification process. Claim 41 recites receiving a certification request including a time stamp receipt and a message authentication code generated on the time stamp receipt, validating the message authentication code, and certifying the time stamp receipt if the message authentication code is valid. Haber does not teach or suggest validating a message authentication code and conditionally certifying a time stamp receipt if the message authentication code is valid. Accordingly, Haber does not anticipate claim 41.

New claims 45 and 46 have been added. Claims 45 and 46 are dependent from claim 41 and further define the act of certifying the time stamp receipt. Claims 47 and 48 are the same as claims 45 and 46, respectively, but depend from claim 1. New claims 49 and 50 are the same as claims 45 and 46 but depend from claim 15. As noted in the patent specification, the time stamp receipt can be certified by signing the time stamp receipt or a message authentication code associated with the time stamp receipt with a private signature key. No new matter has been added.

Based on the foregoing, it is believed that the present application is in condition for allowance and notice to such effect is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,

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